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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TESTIMONY OF JOE BECKER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE, AMERICAN RED CROSS

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Congressman Waxman, Members and staff of the Committee. This is a very timely gathering to address a very important subject. On behalf of my colleagues and friends at the American Red Cross, allow me to begin by saying this:

The American Red Cross is ready for the 2006 hurricane season. Over the past six months, we have reviewed the things we did well in the 2004 and 2005 seasons and improved upon those successes. We have also taken a hard look at those areas where we must improve our response and we continue to address our shortcomings.

The American Red Cross responds to more than 70,000 disasters each year in communities across the United States. The vast majority of these disasters are single family home fires, however anyone who has lost their home to a fire will attest that any disaster – regardless of how small – changes their lives indefinitely. I share this with you because my comments before this Committee on this day are limited solely to the large-scale responses by the American Red Cross when the National Response Plan is activated.

America relies on the Red Cross to deliver our promise of neighbor helping neighbor. Our legendary corps of volunteers is ready. We are working closer today with our colleagues in the nonprofit, charitable and faith-based communities to improve our reach. We are better coordinating with Federal, state and local officials. And, we are pre-positioning more supplies and building greater capacity in key states before the storms hit.

I am very pleased to share with you today our plans for the coming season and our rejuvenated sense of urgency as we address our goals. For as we all know, the next disaster may not show up with advance warning on our weather radar screens. We simply cannot wait for June 1 to be ready for disaster response. For the American Red Cross, we remain on guard each day, everyday.

Katrina: Lessons Learned

Mr. Chairman, the Red Cross provided aid and comfort to nearly 1.4 million families after the storms of last year.

Thanks to the generosity of the American people, we provided an average \$1019.00 per family in emergency financial assistance. This is not money provided to replace what was lost — but to address urgent need.

We provided shelter to nearly 500,000 hurricane survivors (3.4 million shelter nights) in nearly 1,100 shelters in 27 states and the District of Columbia. And we served 65 million meals and snacks.

No matter what measure one uses, our response to this unprecedented disaster was some 20 times larger than anything we had ever experienced before. Despite the fact that errors were made and there were shortcomings, we are proud of our response and the valiant efforts of our volunteers. Still, we are rolling up our sleeves to do even better.

To better prepare for the coming season, we have undertaken several immediate actions:

- Client Assistance System (CAS) software and reporting enhancements to provide a single system of record to support the delivery of assistance to those in need.
 - Enhancements to CAS and an upgraded information technology infrastructure will allow the Red Cross to speed financial assistance to one million affected families within a 10-day period and two million over a longer term.
- Cash-enabled client assistance cards (CAC) as the standard vehicle for providing emergency assistance.
 - One million National Headquarters CAC cards will be pre-stocked so that the cards can be efficiently distributed to families displaced by catastrophic events.
- Emergency assistance call centers to handle a capacity of one million cases in 10 days, or 100,000 completed cases per day, with the capacity to process a total of two million cases.
- A web-based shelter management application based on the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN), developed in conjunction with FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security, that will have the ability to track shelter inventory, facility survey data, population counts, and unmet needs of the shelter population nationwide.
 - As development is completed, chapters will be provided with the required software, and systems will be put into place to begin populating the database with identified shelters. We will work closely with emergency management officials to utilize this shared system. Currently, approximately 44,000 Red Cross shelters will be represented.
- Fourteen dedicated Red Cross staff to coordinate closely with state emergency management agencies in high-risk areas, including the states of Louisiana, California, Mississippi, Alabama,

Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, New York, Arkansas, and Texas.

- Increased stockpiling of supplies (food, cots, blankets, comfort kits, etc.) in key risk states to enable the Red Cross to serve one million meals and shelter 500,000 people per day in the initial days after a disaster strikes.
- Improvements to the Disaster Services Human Resources (DSHR) system to track in real-time staff assigned to relief operations and strengthen the process used for registering spontaneous volunteers. The DSHR system software is also being modified to accommodate DSHR ID Smart Card technology. These improvements will provide better information about available resources.
- Addition of six on-staff disaster relief operation directors to provide leadership to major relief operations as well as mentor and coach chapter and multi-chapter relief operation directors. This will improve the skill sets of administrators and managers in the DSHR system.
- National headquarters is developing several national partnerships that chapters can implement on a local level to engage underserved groups in their communities, such as Hispanic populations or people with disabilities.
- Delivery of "Introduction to Disaster" training to over 400 members across six NAACP conferences.
 - We now have close to 200 trained NAACP members who can help run Red Cross shelters or support their own community shelters. We ask chapters to reach out to their local affiliates of the NAACP to solidify the partnership locally.
- A "Disaster Welfare Information" system for chapters to provide "safe and well" status information to the families and loved ones of disaster victims.
- Response Center Network expansion for a group of chapters that staff the 1-866-GET-INFO line. We will have 250 simultaneous workers in chapters nationwide supporting the information center's work.
- An enhanced Volunteer Match Portal to help manage expectations of large numbers of spontaneous volunteers and provide updated guidance.
- Improved chapter advance procedures and new monitoring and control processes to support the use of the CAC.
- A national Disaster Field Supply Center warehousing system with increased capacity and more critical supplies. We are greatly expanding our warehouse space from about 165,000 square feet to over 1,000,000 square feet (new warehouses are located in Montgomery, AL; Reserve, LA; Charlotte, NC; Pensacola, FL; and Fairfax, VA, with additional agreements pending in Rochester, NY; Little Rock, AK; Reno, NV; and Orlando, FL).

- Pre-positioned redundant communications equipment such as phones, computers, radios, and satellite equipment in 21 cities in nine coastal states.
- Improvements to the online donation system and vendor management.
- An effective, integrated fundraising strategy between local and national units, as well as affected and non-affected areas, during disasters.

Preparedness: Is America Ready?

According to our latest data ...

- 69 percent of Americans have not established a meeting place to reunite with family members;
- 65 percent of pet owners have no plan to keep their pets safe;
- 59 percent have not selected an emergency contact;
- 60 percent have made no specific evacuation plan;
- 73 percent have not practiced their family disaster plan; and
- 48 percent do not have a disaster supplies kit.

While more Americans than ever before have some sort of preparedness kit, they are not certain what it should contain. We need to do a better job engaging our nation's citizens in preparing for disasters big and small. We need to focus our attention on all-hazards preparedness. There are simple steps that every family can take to be safer and to ensure that if separated from their loved ones, they can reconnect. We need to convince every individual and family to make the effort to keep critical documents, medicines, and items they would need immediately in an emergency ready, keeping in mind that, unlike Hurricane Katrina, disasters often provide no warning at all. The American Red Cross teaches families, schools, and businesses to do five things: (1) Make a Plan, (2) Build a Kit, (3) Get Trained, (4) Volunteer, and (5) Give Blood.

Some ongoing initiatives:

- Execution of standard preparedness education in communities. Local Red Cross Chapters are teaching their communities about disasters, about creating family communications plans, and building disaster supplies kits.
- We are reviewing and revising some of our preparedness messages with other Federal partners to reflect post-Katrina realities. For example, the minimal duration of proper food and water stores is now under consideration.
- Development and release of a new module to Masters of Disaster titled, "In the Aftermath," which is designed to help children who were directly and indirectly affected by Katrina to create a new normalcy in their lives.
- The Southeast Louisiana Chapter is collaborating with their local emergency managers in developing educational materials targeting hurricane preparedness for people living in trailers or other temporary mobile housing.

- The Southeast Louisiana Chapter is developing educational materials for migrants and other second language communities in their area.
- Conducted focus group testing of evacuation educational materials to better inform citizens at risk. Our testing has provided useful information on motivations and barriers to evacuating.
- Participated in organizational-wide meetings with leaders and advocates in the disability community to learn more about our mutual Katrina experiences and identify ways to better serve people with disabilities.

Remaining On Guard in Our Communities: The National Response Plan

The American Red Cross is the non-governmental organization with “primary” responsibility as the lead for an emergency support function in the National Response Plan. We also have “supporting” responsibilities in six additional emergency support functions.

The primary role that we play in Emergency Support Function #6 (ESF6) is mass care, housing, and human services. We are the “primary” agency for the “mass care” portion of this function and DHS/FEMA has “primary” responsibility for the “housing, and human services” portion.

As the lead for mass care, the Red Cross coordinates Federal resources in support of state and local mass care efforts. This *coordination* function is often misunderstood, because we are also a *primary provider* (typically the largest provider) of mass care services at the state and local level.

In our coordination role, we process requests from state and local authorities or other non-governmental organizations (with state concurrence) for Federal assistance through the appropriate FEMA channels. This is accomplished by a process where the Red Cross ESF6 liaison completes an Action Request Form (ARF) detailing the specific Federal assistance required. The ARF is forwarded through a FEMA Human Services Branch Chief, then on to an Operations Section Chief for approval where it becomes a “mission assignment” for tasking.

The American Red Cross itself does not “mission assign,” nor are we “mission assigned” under the NRP. It is important to re-emphasize that state and local authorities decide their respective priorities for Federal mass care assistance. This is consistent with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) upon which the NRP is based — that all incidents should be handled at the lowest possible organizational and jurisdictional level. We do not have directive authority over any other Federal agency or non-governmental organization.

In our ESF6 “primary” role, we also relay mass care information (like shelter counts and population) from the field to appropriate government agencies for appropriate action.

Since August 2005, the American Red Cross has participated in at least 18 exercises with our Federal partners. Most recently, our eight regional service areas and over 800 chapters have been involved in numerous hurricane and pandemic flu table top exercises around the country. Here in Washington, we have been full participants in a series of three high-level, White House

Homeland Security Council-sponsored hurricane exercises. Red Cross officials are participating in a cabinet-level exercise this very afternoon.

We have recently reached agreement with FEMA on a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and expect it will be signed by the end of this month. In the MOU we agree to continued cooperation in areas of mutual support, disaster response and recovery, and the performance of respective roles in the National Response Plan. The MOU covers such key elements as coordination of communications, sharing of disaster assessment and assistance data, and the assignment of Red Cross ESF6 liaisons at key FEMA locations. These discussions have led to our efforts to build a comprehensive web-based shelter data base that will be of great use for pre-event planning and improved situational awareness during a disaster.

We are also in contact with our counterparts at the Departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development, as well as other Federal agencies to explore similar avenues for cooperation in planning and information sharing.

In short, we feel very good about the relationships we have developed, and continue to build on, here in Washington.

Additionally, under the Catastrophic Incident Annex/Supplement (CIA/S), the American Red Cross takes the lead for development of the Mass Care component. In our lead role, we participated in interagency coordination efforts, including planning, submission of comments, and attendance of meetings/exercises which occurred over the course of 18 months concluding in May 2005. The CIA/S was developed with the understanding that it would be activated by the Secretary of Homeland Security during a catastrophic event to make available and send significant amounts of Federal resources downrange to states prior to or during an event.

In the course of the development effort, the Red Cross realized that no state or local metropolitan area could handle the numbers used as the planning assumptions (100,000 to 300,000) for Mass Care. To address the anticipated gaps, we developed a Mass Care Planning Initiative in order to expand mass care capability at the state and local level. We sought Federal funding for this capacity enhancement in the amount of \$180 million in FY2006, an amount not yet funded. These funds would resource communities to build the capacity of people and supplies to meet the targets under the CIA/S. Catastrophic planning is tantamount to ensuring we are prepared to respond to any disaster be it manmade or natural. As we learned from the sheer size and scale of Katrina's impact, some of the underlying assumptions in the CIA/S were not squarely on target. Indeed, there is more work that needs to be done in this regard. Communities need the resources ahead of time, as we well know.

Working in Partnership with Others

We recognize that solid and effective partnerships are critical to this country's disaster response. These partnerships need to happen at the Federal, state, and local level, and particularly among the non-governmental sector. One of the internal initiatives mentioned above is to place fourteen Red Cross full-time employees with state-emergency management agencies in high risk states. We want to make sure that the partnerships we build with these states remain strong — so we are committing full-time employees to working year-round with their state counterparts. We also

think it will pay big dividends as these state liaisons work with our Red Cross “Federal liaisons” when they become activated during a disaster.

Currently, we have Red Cross ESF6 experts working on sheltering and evacuation planning in the state of Louisiana at the request of the governor and FEMA. Additionally, our service areas in Houston, Texas and Birmingham, Alabama are actively involved with similar planning efforts in the other Gulf Coast states.

At the local level, we are asking our chapters to reach out to community-based and faith-based groups, particularly in diverse communities to solidify our partnerships. This initiative, recently approved by our Board of Governors, is a major shift in the way we do business. We will offer these partners resources like training, and access to equipment and supplies to increase not just the “Red Cross” sheltering and feeding capability, but those of the entire community. Guidance on how to do this just recently went to our chapters in the field. We expect this initiative will improve our sheltering capability as well as improve our outreach efforts and cooperation with the many diverse communities we serve.

We are also partnering with the private sector. We had some great successes teaming with a number of corporate partners during our response to Katrina, and we are building on those relationships. Corporations are of instrumental value to our nation’s ability to respond, not just by way of monetary donations. In fact, we are looking to borrow “best of class” processes in areas such as supply chain management to improve our future response efforts, and we are grateful for the support we have been given.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am extremely proud of the work by the more than 225,000 Red Crossers in responding to the devastating effects of Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. We can be proud of the work of ALL of the nonprofit organizations that responded to Katrina. Our friends and colleagues in the nonprofit community answered the call. I am confident that the actions we have taken internally, and those in conjunction with our Federal, state, local, other NGO, and private sector partners, will result in an even better response for the next disaster.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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